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Introduction

> *"I was not born in this region but attracted to its geological and biological diversity. I make the decision to live here."* (John Charles Ryan n.p. *Plants in Contemporary Poetry: Ecocriticism and the Botanical Imagination*)

Natural vegetation is one the most essential factors for leading a balanced life on earth. It includes plants, shrubs, trees, creepers and microgreens. Plants and trees being autotrophic, form the base of the food chain hierarchy. Vegetal bodies play a vital role in satisfying all the basic needs of the other living beings on the earth. They constitute the bulk of visible biomass, underpin all natural ecosystems, and make life on earth possible.

Plants being stationary are considered passive by human beings who place themselves to be superior to the other living creatures because of their unique intellectual capacity. Human beings often ignore the existence of other living creatures on the earth, especially plants, perhaps because they are supposedly voiceless. This human prejudice against plants is termed as 'plant blindness'. It indicates a bias similar to speciesism and it renders plants as lower lives. Human beings also utilise and exploit plants to satisfy their limitless greed and have caused heavy destruction of plants on earth. Plants are also considered non-sentient and are thoughtlessly and often casually placed outside normal consideration in many human discourses. If this human neglect continues, it is said that the survival of plants will be threatened and this reality calls for a more ethical and rational behaviour towards plants.

Literature, as contrary to real world practice, has used plants often as symbols and images. From epics to cave paintings, plant-based themes and vegetal motifs have abounded in both the Indian and western cultural records. Plants and their parts such as leaves, vines, flowers and fruits have been alluded to and evoked in many literary works. Such plentiful presence of

vegetal bodies in literature has inspired an interdisciplinary research endeavour called phytocriticism which serves to analyse the botanical themes and metaphors in various cultural records. Further, this branch of study explores how literature enhances plant study and how botanical details enrich poetry and literature.

This research is an attempt to apply the tenets of Phytocriticism in the reading pre-Independence Indian English poetry which had revealed closer associations with nature, plants, vegetal bodies and trees. It also tries to trace the botanical details in the selected works of Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo to show how these poets were trying to provide a philosophy that challenges plant blindness. Incidentally, Indian English poets of the Pre-Independence era were close connected to the flora and fauna. Tagore also makes a reference to 'Aranya Sanskriti' the cultural lesson to be learned from a forest. What he implies is that in a forest every life is interconnected and that which dies becomes the fodder for the living.

Importance of the Theme

A study of Indian English poetry from a phytocritical perspective is significant as it adds a botanical approach to the available body scholarship on Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo. It also explores the plant-centered reading of Indian poetry and opens discussions on plant sentience, plant personality, plant motifs, plant behaviour and human-plant relationship. Further, by examining how these poets depict plants and trees, one can infer their varying degrees of attachment and distance to vegetal intelligence. Also examined in this study will be the representation of plant bodies and not merely the use of plants as poetic devices. Pain of the plants is another important theme in literature and this study investigates if the Indian English poems under scrutiny manages to muster sympathy and empathy for plants.

John Charles Ryan coined the term 'Botanical Criticism' in his book *Plants and Contemporary Poetry*. It is a subset of Ecocriticism and investigates how poets engage with plants literally, figuratively, materially and symbolically.

In the Imitative phase of Indian English Poetry, poets like Henry Derozio and Michael Madhusudan Dutt were prominent. Toru Dutt laid emphasis on India and its rich heritage and is the predecessor with respect to the use of tree in verse as demonstrated in her poem "Our Casuarina Tree". In the poem she has used the tree as a symbol of her childhood and cultural memories. The prominent poets of the second phase i.e., Romantic Nationalism are Sarojini Naidu, Rabindranath Tagore and Aurobindo Ghosh, among others. Many of these poets tried to connect Nature with nationalism. Vegetal Bodies were used as background tools. Aurobindo Ghosh has described the pastoral life in his poem "Savitri"; Rabindranath Tagore focused on the oneness of Nature and man and Sarojini Naidu's poems gave voice to the contemporary Indian spirit with clear references to many vegetal elements in her inimitable melodious style.

Vegetal Bodies have also been used interestingly in the Experimental phase. Poets like Dilip Chitre and Gieve Patel have used trees as characters and described their slaughter in the poems, "Killing of the Banyan Tree" and "On Killing of a Tree" respectively and several other poets have written about the destruction of Nature and natural elements and have generated a green consciousness.

Research Objectives

1) To study the representation of vegetal bodies in the selected poems of Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, Sri Aurobindo and Rabindranath Tagore

2) To examine the corpus references of vegetal bodies in the selected poems of Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, Sri Aurobindo and Rabindranath Tagore

3) To apply the tenets of Phytocriticism in the analysis of the poems of Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, Sri Aurobindo and Rabindranath Tagore

4) To see assess the degrees of plant blindness and phytophilia in these poems

5) To apply the tenets of arboreal poetics, Human-Plant Studies and Critical Plant Studies in the reading of the selected poems

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is based on the independent variable of phytocritical analysis and the dependent variables of the poetic representations of plants in the verses of Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, Sri Aurobindo and Rabindranath Tagore. It will also take into account the tools derived from ecocriticism, phytocriticism, culture studies and close reading. The following operational terms are also significant in the framework:

Vegetal Bodies: Pertaining to plants or a plant, all that is related to flora. Vegetal bodies include plants, flowers, fruits etc.

Plant Studies: It is the scientific study of plants—how plants function, what they look like, how they are related to each other, where they grow, how people make use of plants, how plants have evolved and how plants define certain cultures.

Botanical Imagination: This indicates how plants occupy a significant place in imaginative writing. It also indicates how a discipline like Botany is best articulated in poetry.

Phytocriticism: It is the extension of ecocriticism. Phytocriticism energizes the process of reformulating human assumptions about the nature of representation, reference, metaphor, characterization, personae, and canonicity. The phytocritical impulse of this study is to disclose

the rootedness of botanical poetry in the vibrant materiality of nature and to embrace a conception of the plant as more than a textual artifice or insensate phenomenon. A phytocritical outlook emphasizes the agencies of botanical beings in poetic texts and considers how plants are rendered, evoked, mediated, or brought to life in and through language.

Ecocriticism: An interdisciplinary field of study that analyses how the natural world is portrayed in literature, typically in relation to modern environmental concerns. It endeavours to study literature in its physical environment.

Biophilia: It is the innate and genetically conditioned affinity of human beings with the natural world. This term was coined by the Harvard biologist, Edward Wilson and it also stands for the human interest in all life forms. By extension, it also means a sense of obligation to treat other forms of life with loving care.

Phytophilia: Any organism that thrives around plants. A person who is especially interested in plants. It also stands for the positive human attitude towards plants and trees.

Plant Blindness: Human inability to see or notice plants in one's everyday life is a phenomenon known as plant blindness. It also refers to failing to recognize the role of plants on earth and believing that plants are somehow inferior to animals. It is also the human prejudice against plants.

Critical Plant Studies: Critical Plant Studies tries to initiate an interdisciplinary dialogue, whereby philosophy and literature are correlated. It tries to develop a study involving plants, culture, language and identities.

Arboreal Poetics: It is an attempt to consider the role of trees in poetry and other literary texts. It is also about the study of literary devices such as metaphors, similes and aphorism which have references to trees.

Plant Subjectivity: It is the idea that plants are individuals with an ability to think, feel and express. Contrary to the popular belief, plant subjectivity assumes an agential personhood for plants and trees. Plant activism is based on this assumption.

Vegetal Dialectics: A Vegetal Dialectics is marked by the oscillation of states of difference and sameness between plants and non-plants. In preserving the irreducible otherness of flora, a dialectics provides a conceptual space for comprehending that the absolute familiarity of plants coincides with their sheer strangeness. A dialectics modulates the binarizing discourses surrounding plant nature—notably, as lacking thought, feeling, sensation, and response—and enables the subjectivities and agencies of vegetal being to come forth – pertaining to plants or a plant, all that is related to flora.

Research Problems and Hypothesis

Indian English poets of the pre-independence era have been rich in their use of plant motifs and images. It addresses the question if their poems enhance the understanding of Indian biospheres with their lush references to plants and tree.

1. The selected poems of Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, Sri Aurobindo and Rabindranath Tagore are good instances of botanical imagination.
2. These poems enhance phytophilia, the love for plants.
3. These poems also interrogate plant blindness, the prejudice againt plants and trees.
4. These poems also sensitize the readers to the theme of plant subjectivity and plant personhood.
5. These verses underline the benefits of human-plant relationship.
6. These poems mobilize plant/tree/flower symbolism and highlight the floral, culinary, cultural and environmental importance of plants and trees.

The Research will highlight the representation of Vegetal Bodies in Selected Poems of three eminent women poets of India. It will endeavour to change the perspective of readers to comprehend and understand the role of Vegetal Bodies in the works of Literature.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

The Research will examine the representation of vegetal bodies in selected poems of Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, Sri Aurobindo and Rabindranath Tagore through the lens of 'Phytocriticism', which is an extension of Ecocriticism. The Research will study the botanical outlook of the four selected Indian English poets. It will underline the inter relationship between botany and literature and will adopt an inter-disciplinary approach. The Research will reflect upon the interest and sensitivity of the selected Indian poets towards the floral world. Four poets and their plant-based poems make a significant corpus of primary sources. The study also has a pedagogical scope as the tools and methods employed can be useful in the classroom discussions on other plant-based texts including novels and films.

One of the possible limitations of the proposed study is in its sampling method. The poems are randomly selected and not all Indian English poets are included in the study but rather only four poets of the pre-independence era figure in the research. However, such a selection can be justified for the sake of an era-restricted and area-restricted sampling.

Data Collection and Methodology

The primary source, comprising of the selected poems of Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, Sri Aurobindo and Rabindranath Tagore will be accessed from various anthologies on Indian English poerty. The secondary sources, includes research articles, critical studies and critical theories will accessed from books, journals and online resources such as Inflibnet, Jstor,

ProQuest and EBSCOhost. Further, resource centres such as British Council Library and American Centre Library will also be visited for the same purpose.

The proposed study will employ the methods of analytical research and descriptive research. The selected poems will be analysed to trace the elements of plant life depicted in them. Further the study will also mobilize the methods and tools of Phytocriticism which draws upon Ecocriticism, Botany and Culture Studies. Theoretical and interpretative methods will be used to analyse the selected poems. Close readings of the texts will be done to interpret the poems.

Review of Literature

A study of Indian English poetry using the lens of phytocriticism is relatively new in the body scholarship on Indian English literature. However, there have been a few studies at the international level, exploring the vegetal content in poetry and fiction. One can also find a few theoretical engagements on plant emotions, plant cognition, plant intelligence, plant personhood and botanical imagination. A survey of these works helps in identifying the tools of analysis and to build a conceptual framework.

In his book, *Plants and Contemporary Poetry,* John Charles Ryan has studied the representation of plants in poetry. Positioned within the current ecocritical scholarship, this volume is the first book-length study of the representations of plants in contemporary American, English and Australian poetry. Through readings of botanically-minded writers such as Les Murray, Louise Gluck and Alice Oswald, the book addresses the relationship between language and the subjectivity, agency, sentience, consciousness and intelligence of vegetal life. Scientific, philosophical and literary frameworks have enabled the author to develop an interdisciplinary approach towards examining the role of plants in poetry.

Plants are People too? No, but in this work of philosophical botany, Matthew Hall challenges readers to reconsider the moral standing of plants arguing that they are other-than-human persons. Hall surveys Western, Eastern, Pagan and indigenous thoughts, as well as modern science for attitudes towards plants, noting the particular resources for plant personhood and those modes of thought which most exclude plants. Hierarchical systems typically put plants at the bottom, but Hall lists much to support a more significant view about plants. Indeed, some indigenous animisms actually recognize plants as relational, intelligent beings that are deserving recipients of care and respect. New scientific findings encourage this perspective, revealing that plants possess many of the capacities of sentience and mentality traditionally denied to them.

Shakespearean scholar, Gerit Quealy has collaborated with notable Japanese artist, Sumi Hasegawa to create the first and only book that includes every plant mentioned in Shakespeare's works, along with striking illustrations. The heart of *Botanical Shakespeare* contains a commentary on each flower, fruit, grain, grass, tree, herb, spice and vegetable that Shakespeare has mentioned in his plays and poems, with the origins of these references.

The thinking capacity of plants is demonstrated by Michael Marder in his book *Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life*. This book gives a clear picture of the struggle of plants for their identity while human beings unthinkingly ignore their existence, Michael Marder has attempted to prove albeit, very convincingly that plants have an extremely high thinking capacity.

The emergence of Environmental Criticism in recent decades stems from "very ancient roots.""While acknowledging that reflection about the material world has a long history based in early cosmologies and intellectual concerns, Lawrence Buell's book *The Future of Environmental Criticism* aims to assess what is new in the relationship between writing and

the environment, how such critical and creative engagement is relevant to life on earth today and the potential for Environmental Criticism to develop much needed interdisciplinary perceptions and values for an endangered Planet Earth.

In the article "The Poetics of Plants" in Latin American literature, Lesley Wylie speaks about the colonisation of plants. Due to the European domination the South Americans used to grow crops like sugarcane, coffee and rubber. Coffee became the important crop growing there. This colonisation of plants had a great influence even on the literature of the Latin America. These crops gained importance in most of literary texts of Latin America. This article shows how plants and politics are correlated and how this can be connected and reflected in the literary works.

The article "Phytographia" by Patricia Viera emphasizes on communication between plants and human beings. It tries to investigate upon the fact whether plants can speak and if they can what and how would they express their feelings regarding environment and human beings. The articles states that plants communicate many times to safeguard themselves from danger, and also during the pollination process. Research is carried out to convert the electrical signals given by plants into a proper coded language. This article shows that plants can outpour their feeling and can present their autobiography – phytography. This phytography can open a new field of imagination and creativity for many writers and poets.

In an article on trees and plants in Caribbean poetry, Lamia M. S. Z. Tewfik, reflects a wonderful gaze on plants, trees and bushes. According to her, reference to vegetal bodies in Caribbean poetry evoke historical sufferings, losses, survival and nostalgia. She also asserts that tree veneration particularly in line with Indian practice can also be seen in Caribbean verses. Further, she opines that a reading of Caribbean poems with plants and trees in focus evokes eco criticism and a concern for environment. She also focuses on cultural diversity

implicated by plants and trees and also emphasizes on ecocentric message of striking balance between man and nature.

The article "Nature and its Symbolic Representation in Tagore's Poetry" by Ananya Mukherjee and Tanmoy Baghira proves that Rabindranath Tagore was a believer in the co-existence of nature and human being. Nature is a major symbol in his poetry which creates a consciousness in the poet's as well as in the reader's mind. It is more than an objective reality for him; in his poems nature breaths the air of joy and sings the songs of harmony. In most of his poem's nature is so inseparably connected with the main theme that it seems they are complimentary to each other. Mukherjee and Baghira stare that Tagore's poems bear a major change with the ripening of the poet's mature years but the sensibility and the faith in nature remains constant.

The article "Nature in the Poetry of Sarojini Naidu" by Dr. Rajesh Kumar Pandit describes Sarojini Naidu's ardent love for nature specially the vegetal bodies like fruit, flowers, tree etc. Her poem had a deep connection between nature and culture of India. In many poems she has metaphorically described the fruits and flowers to show the cultural heritage of India. Nature is one of the core elements in her poems and vegetal bodies hold the central position in nature. Her poems have very vivid and picturesque description of nature. In this article the author has tried to focus on the element of biophilia in her poems.

The studies mentioned above indicate that phytocriticism is an emerging area in ecocriticism and it opens exiting domains in literary studies. The books and articles discussed also point to the fact that plants have been under-rated in literary and cultural studies and they need to be mainstreamed in the light of the contemporary interest in non-human stakeholders in literature and cultural texts.

Tentative Scheme of Chapters

Poetry is a medium of expressing thoughts and emotions. The proposed research will focus on how plants are portrayed in selected poems of Indian English writers, Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, Aurobindo Ghosh and Rabindranath Tagore. It will draw heed to the deep emotions of the selected poets in connection with vegetal bodies. The tentative scheme of chapters of the thesis will be as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter will introduce the subject by laying the emphasis on the significance of vegetal bodies in literature. It will underline the history of Indian English poetry by highlighting different phases with their common unique themes. It will also describe the history and land-marks of botanical criticism in Literary and Cultural Studies. This chapter will also construct a theoretical framework based of Ecocriticism and Phytocriticism. It will, in the process, evoke the ideas of Charles Ryan, Michael Marder, Matthew Hall, Laurence Buell, Les Murray, Louise Gluck and Alice Oswald.

Chapter 2: Analysing Selected Poems of Toru Dutt

This chapter will discuss the representation of vegetal bodies and vegetal motifs in Toru Dutt's poems such as "Our Casuarina Tree", "Lotus" and "Savitri". This chapter will deal with the life and biographical facts of Toru Dutt and will investigate how Toru Dutt's poems have laid the foundation of botanical imagination and vegetal creativity. Also within the purview of this chapter is the study of language and metaphors in Dutt's poerty that bear the influence of

plants and trees. This chapter will, further, explore the tree-based aesthetics which Dutt develops in her verses.

Chapter 3: Analysing Selected Poems of Sarojini Naidu

This chapter will discuss the life of Sarojini Naidu with a focus on her interest in plants and non-human lives and the themes and style of her poetry. It will analyse Sarojini Naidu's interest in vegetal bodies and will focus on her intelligent and creative use of them in her selected poems such as "The Summer Woods", "The Lotus", "The Call of Spring", and "The Sunset in June". It will examine the link between Naidu's phytophilia and nationalism as revealed in the poems under scrutiny.

Chapter 4: Analysing Selected Poems of Rabindranath Tagore

This chapter will explore Tagore's love for nature. It will talk about his inclination towards natural elements, especially vegetal elements like fruits, flowers, trees, etc. Tagore has effectively made use of vegetal elements as images in most of his works. In his book Gitanjali he has used vegetal bodies as symbols and metaphors and has driven the connection between vegetal bodies and spiritualism. The poem such as "Morning Sea of Silence," "I Ask Nothing from Thee", "Languor is upon your Heart", "Let all the Strains of Joy Mingle in my Last Song", and "Yes I know this Nothing but thy Love" have portrayed vegetal bodies as instruments to attain spiritualism. He has made use of flowers as symbols of happiness and joy. According to him, nature is medium to move closer to God. One can notice the confluence of spiritualism, and environmentalism in his poems.

Chapter 5: Analysing Selected Poems of Sri Aurobindo Ghosh

Sri Aurobindo Ghosh is popularly known for his theories related to education and nature. He always insisted that one can get true knowledge only in the laps of nature. His poems underline the theory that nature is a great teacher. He mostly gave importance to vegetal elements in the nature and proved they are the only source of life on the earth. This chapter will explain how poems such as "To the Cuckoo", "Night by the Sea", "O Coïl, Coïl", "Lines on Ireland", "On a Satyr and Sleeping Love", and "A Rose of Women" replicate the connection between Indian culture and nature, especially the vegetal elements such as flowers, fruit etc.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The chapter will demonstrate the botanical view-points of the four Indian English poets of the Pre-Independence era. It will combine their view points and will further try to derive conclusions and inferences out of it. The conclusions will help readers to relate and understand the perspective of the selected Indian poets towards the botanical world and will engender greater reverence and care for vegetal bodies. The respective responses of the poets towards plant blindness, plant emotions and plant personhood will also be dealt with in this chapter.

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